

**CHRISTIANITY**  
**AND**  
**MARXISM**

*A Symposium*

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POLEMIC PUBLISHERS

POLEMIC PAMPHLET NUMBER 2

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*Edited by* S. L. SOLON

## CHRISTIANITY AND MARXISM

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POLEMIC PUBLISHERS  
New York, 1934

## Introduction

THE importance of the present discussion on Christianity and Marxism is self-evident. The questions which are raised in this Symposium and which the participants attempt to answer are not mechanical issues formulated for the sake of controversy. They are living questions which are now engaging the thoughts of thousands of men and women. Particularly, it is youth who is affected by the growing political ferment throughout the world, a state of affairs which has its reverberations in the various church organizations, publications and congresses.\* Consequently it is youth who is most concerned with the questions:

What is Marxism? What does it propose?  
What has Christianity to say about the present world crisis?  
What does Christianity object to in Marxism?  
Is Marxism compatible with Christianity?  
Does Christianity recognize the class-struggle?  
What does Christianity think about action? About revolution?  
What was the rôle of the Church in the historically progressive movements of the past?  
Has it the same rôle today?  
Is Christianity "above the battle"? What does this mean?  
*On which side is the Church?*

These are only a few of the questions now on the order of the day. In the following essays certain of these questions are discussed. It cannot be said, however, that all of these questions have received a comprehensive and extended treatment. In a certain sense, the answers of the writers to some of the questions listed above are implicit in the general philosophical positions which they take.

\* At the recent annual convention of the Northern Baptist Churches, Dr. C. W. Kemper in the keynote address said: "Today the Communist Youth Movement thrills to the slogan which they chant, 'We are changing the world.' . . . The teaching of two Jews, Jesus and Karl Marx, is struggling for supremacy today, dramatically in the great populous countries of the Orient and more seriously than we like to confess in the Western world. The Christian Cross is no longer the symbol of the vast population of the earth. While we boasted political democracy, our undemocratic, not to say inhumane, economic life has elevated dictators on all sides. . . ."

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Nevertheless, it seems to the editor that in the discussion there is often an ambiguity, a lack of clarity, a failure to cross swords, as it were, and fight within striking distance of each other.

Mr. Henson begins his essay with the statement, "I am a Marxist. I, also, am a catholic Christian." No definition, however, is made of the term "catholic Christian." Is Christianity something which is above the different *weltanschauungen*? Can a person be a Christian irrespective of the fact that he accepts either an idealistic or a materialistic view of life? Apparently, Mr. Henson thinks so. But how then does Mr. Henson square this with the Marxist view of religion? More precisely, how does Mr. Henson regard the statement of Marx that: "The social principles of Christianity justified the slavery of classical days; they glorified medieval serfdom; and they are able when needs be to defend the oppression of the proletariat, though with a somewhat crestfallen air"?

Mr. Henson notes that, "the class struggle is beginning to near the decisive hour . . . and the process of dissolution in bourgeois society is accelerating at a terrific rate. One begins to see the effects of this process in those sections of the churches which are most sensitive to social, economic and cultural trends." At the same time, Mr. Henson recognizes that "German Protestantism represents the complete debacle and capitulation to reaction" and "Roman Catholicism leaves no doubt where it stands in the struggle for power. It is fiercely anti-Marxist." *Why?* As a Marxist, would not Mr. Henson inquire into the economic and social bases of these churches? And in view of such bases can Mr. Henson adhere to his statement that: "If some of us within the Christian community can deflect the stream of emphasis of the hopeful section of Protestant Christianity, there is some possibility of conserving for the new socialized order, into which we are inevitably moving, more of the most permanently valuable psychological and religious insights that are associated with real Christianity." Obviously, Mr. Henson's adherence to Christianity lies in his belief in the potency of these "most permanently valuable psychological and religious insights that are associated with real Christianity." What are they? Can Mr. Henson define them without rupturing either his faith in their efficacy or his acceptance of the Marxist materialist interpretation of history?

Professor Van Dusen states that "Christianity finds nothing in the *dialectic interpretation of history* incompatible with its own view of the matter"; nor does Christianity find any difficulty "with the Marxist *emphasis upon revolution*." However, against the Marxist

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"theory of the *economic* determination of history," Christianity counterposes the belief in "the *moral* determination of history." "This conviction of Christianity," writes Professor Van Dusen, "like all profound certainties, is born of an initial intuition into the character of reality; but it receives its confirmation from fearless analysis of the brute facts of human history." Dr. Hook takes issue with Professor Van Dusen, contending that the "moral realities" are entirely relative; that what is a virtue known as "thrift" in one stage of society is a vice called "hoarding" or "gluttony for money or power" in another social period. "What is the evidence," asks Dr. Hook, "that human beings were more sinful in 1929 than in 1923?"

It is Dr. Hook's opinion that the primary difference which Professor Van Dusen has with Marxism hinges on the question of "the metaphysical status of ethical ideals." "For the Marxist," Dr. Hook writes, "ethical ideals have *social* reality . . . (they) arise out of determinate *social* conditions and have as their function the perpetuation or transformation of the social order in which they are developed. In the eyes of a Marxist, any other view of the status of ethical ideals leads to unintelligible mysticism or else to the position that 'whatever is, is right'."

This Symposium on Christianity and Marxism is not presented to the public as a final and conclusive word on the subject. This is not said in the interests of polite controversy; the editor has already suggested what he regards to be the deficiencies of the present discussion. This pamphlet is rather published in the hope that it will serve as a forward step to the ultimate clarification of the issues involved. If its readers are helped to better appreciate and understand some of the questions indicated in the forepart of this introductory note, the pamphlet will have served its function. From an understanding of the issues, it is hoped, will come action in the interests of a better social order.

Finally, we thank *The Christian Register* for permission to reprint these articles which first appeared in its pages. To Mr. Henson, Dr. Hook, and Professor Van Dusen we are pleased to publicly express our gratitude for their co-operation.

September, 1934.

S. L. SOLON, Editor



## CHRISTIANITY AND MARXISM

### The Challenge of Marxism to Christianity

Francis A. Henson

I AM a Marxist. I, also, am a catholic Christian. I claim the right to characterize myself in this way because I consider my present philosophy of life to be a dialectical synthesis of these streams of thought and life. There are persons who insist that making such a claim is equivalent to trying to reconcile the irreconcilable; this is the case only if one considers Christianity and Marxism to be authoritative *per se* as bodies of doctrine. Historically, the Christian community has had an amazing capacity to express itself in new forms appropriate to each age. This has been its genius and its nemesis. It is the contention of this article that Marxism corrects the unsound atomistic individualism of the period since the Renaissance and Reformation, while contributing a method of making future history. If some of us within the Christian community can deflect the stream of emphasis of the hopeful section of Protestant Christianity, there is some possibility of conserving for the new socialized order, into which we are inevitably moving, more of the most permanently valuable psychological and religious insights that are associated with real Christianity. Unless this is possible, American Christianity of the prophetic sort will probably line up, with organized religion as a whole, against Marxism in a way similar to that of Protestantism in Germany. German Protestantism represents the complete debacle and capitulation to reaction of this kind of religion, in the face of the collapse of the bourgeois order. Roman Catholicism leaves no doubt where it stands in this struggle for power. It is fiercely anti-Marxist.

#### Marx was a Revolutionary

In my interpretation of Marx, I must acknowledge a very great debt of gratitude to Lenin, Robert Whitaker, Sidney Hook, and Sherman Chang. There is no canonical life of Marx. His disciples disagree about his real meaning and significance. However, I am convinced from my participation in the radical movement

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and my study of Marx's own writings and those of his interpreters, that Marx is to be understood only as a revolutionist. This means that the group interpreting him most correctly in theory and practice is the revolutionary group. Although most of such Marxists are in the Communist parties, there are some revolutionary Marxists in the Socialist parties. However, the Marxism of Social Democracy in Germany and other European countries seems to me basically to be revisionism which stands for a gradualism and reformism, and thereby perpetuates a system which has few of the values of genuine capitalism and little of the robustness of real Socialism. Eduard Bernstein's position, although called a revisionist Marxist position, was, as many in the British Labor Party realized, not Marxist at all but really a form of working-class liberalism.

I mention these personal matters reluctantly but deliberately because there is no presuppositionless position and I do not avow neutrality in this statement. The implications of the Lippmanian viewpoint that it is possible to be neutral and that values are derived from a social situation without reference to *a priori* considerations, are invalid, from a Marxist standpoint. Disinterestedness in the outcome of this inquiry is limited to drawing proper conclusions from the premises. I do not want to conceal my interests and bias, but I would like to use them in order to reveal more effectively the interests of those who make a cult of impartiality.

### Marx was Realistic

One of the major challenges that Marxism offers to the Christian community is in its approach to the questions of life. Marxism is realistic and materialistic, philosophically speaking, and the dominant Christian approach idealistic and ideological. Some of Marx's most vigorous polemical struggles were waged with his former allies in the Hegelian tradition who refused to give up the mystical and idealistic trappings of the Hegelian dialectic.

Again and again as one reads Marx and as one becomes acquainted with the Marxian movement expressing itself in the Communist and Socialist parties, one is impressed with the importance of this realistic approach. In the Communist Manifesto, the theories outlined are declared to "serve merely to express in general terms the concrete circumstances of an actually existing class struggle: *of an historical movement which is going on under our very eyes.*" In a letter to Ruge, Marx wrote: "We do not set ourselves up against the world in doctrinaire fashion with a new principle: Here

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is the truth! Here you must kneel! We develop new principles out of the existing world. We do not proclaim it: cease from your struggles! They are silly; we will tell you what to fight for. We only show the world what it is that it is really fighting for; that consciousness is something which it must acquire even against its will."

The world is brought to self-consciousness by having revealed to it the hidden presuppositions of social attitudes and their practical effects upon the organization of social life. This Marxist method of criticism distinguishes between the success of ideological forms seemingly generated by the self-development of ideas, and the conflicts of social life which find sublimated expression in that development. In his Introduction to the "Critique of Political Economy," Marx writes:

Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so we cannot judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary this consciousness must rather be explained from the contradictions of material life.

In other words, Marxism does not deny the existence of social consciousness but seeks to explain it in terms of the institutional activities of men. Group or class ideals are understood in terms of their genesis and function in the social process. The actual import of any cultural or religious doctrine is to be found in its impact upon the behavior of men; in the uses to which it is put, and the leverage it offers to keep things as they are or to change them.

Very few Christians approximate this realistic, one might say naturalistic, approach to life's problems. In the United States, perhaps Henry Nelson Wieman comes nearest to it in his philosophy of religion. Professor Wieman is continually emphasizing the necessity of making a right adjustment to God, the brickwall fact. He has defined him at times as *at least* the "subtle and intricate weaving of the world process." In Europe, Paul Tillich is an outstanding example of one who approaches realism in religion. Richard Niebuhr in translating his book, "The Present Religious Situation," describes Professor Tillich's position in the unusual but very suggestive English designation, "belief-ful realism."

Incidentally, Professor Wieman and Professor Tillich, in their approaches to God, come very close to being able to qualify philosophically as Marxists. With Marx the social or material was primary and the psychological secondary, if not in point of departure



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at least in order of dependence. As one Marxist explains this position:

The ideologies which have moved men may have their roots in the funded tradition of the past but they owe their stimulus to develop to some immediate need of the present. They no more defy this kind of analysis than precious stones, because they can be classified among the carbon compounds, can defy treatment from the standpoint of a sociology of class taste.

Marxism declares not only that man is a vital being more than he is an intellectual being, but that the world—and inferentially any God there is—is vital and material more than intellectual—mainly ideas and ideals. Dialectically, however, there is no conflict between the psychical and the physical in Marxism. The importance of this challenge to Christianity is that many Christians, simple ones as well as the philosophically minded, habitually approach life's problems in terms of "what ought to be true and therefore, must be true," "the reasonableness of Christianity," "there ought to be a God—there is a God." Few Christians have been other than philosophical idealists. The Marxist begins with *what is* in the phenomenal world. His philosophy of history is *what he knows*. His ethic is *what he wants* in terms of *what he knows*. He knows that he is what he is because in the main he is where he is when he is; therefore, he can get further only by implementing his ideals, which are legitimate when derived from an understanding of the world process and based on reality, with the revolutionary method of dialectical criticism.)

The social process, according to Marx, is not an automatic process. It operates through the consciousness of classes. Man is not a machine although he is endowed with mechanisms. Society is not a mechanism, although the technocrats talk about the increasing productivity of our machines. The historical setting determines the occasion of wants; it determines what is wanted and how it is wanted, but it does not determine the wanting. It is interesting to read Marx, when he writes:

The materialistic doctrine that men are products of their environment and education; different men products of different environment and education, forgets that the environment itself has been changed by men and the educator must be educated. . . . The simultaneity of both change in the environment and human activity or self-change can only be grasped and rationally understood as revolutionary practice.

Elsewhere he writes: (By acting on the external world and

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changing it, man changes his own nature.") There is nothing mechanistic or predetermined in such a statement! —

Another major challenge of Marxism is its opposition to social atomism, which the Protestant Church, if not the Catholic Church, has not only accepted in bourgeois society but sanctified. In this opposition Marx and Hegel, from whom he received so much and yet with whom he differed so violently, agree. It has been suggested that because Marx and Hegel fight against the same opponents, they share certain positive doctrines. This is one of them. They both fought doctrines which tried to base a social philosophy upon the desires of the empirical self—a self which made its own bargains, selected its vocation and ordered its life in independence of the lives of others. These doctrines were viewed by Hegel as attempts to splinter the unity of social activity into innumerable tiny fragments. Each fragment—partial, limited and unconscious of its history and interrelations—regards itself as a cosmos in which the other fragments are mirrored as distorted reflections of itself. In multiplying these atomic absolutes, the organizing relations which bind them into a larger whole are dissolved. Hegel calls bourgeois society "society as a human herd." In this society every atom regards himself as central and treats all other atoms as extrinsic means to the fulfillment of his personal, irrational end. There can be no rational planning or purpose in bourgeois society because rational willing means, in Hegel, willing informed by knowledge of the structure of the whole. But also in Marx is this the case because he writes:

The egoistic individual of bourgeois society may in his silly imagination and petrified abstraction puff himself up into a self-sufficient atom, that is to say, into an absolutely complete and blessed creature, independent from any need.

But his daily experience and activity compel him to recognize his manifold relationships with others. There are social bonds that none may escape. But—as Sidney Hook, whom I consider one of the ablest interpreters of Marx in the United States, points out—these human bonds under capitalism are used by the capitalists to satisfy their own needs. Human beings become means, not ends. The whole social environment of persons and things now becomes an object of interest. To be is to be perceived in relation to some interest. These relations are objectified in numerical figures in cash-book and ledger. They potentially dominate and ultimately dissolve other relations which at first sight seem utterly foreign to

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lowly economic interests—family, school, church, and culture. Pretending that individuals are free and equal before the law and in the market, the bourgeois has cynically torn away the countless social ties which make men members of one another's body and

Left no other bond betwixt man and man but crude self-interest  
and unfeeling cash payment.

In the spirit of social atomism there is a wide-spread conception of liberty on the part of liberals that is merely bourgeois liberty. Incidentally, it is significant to notice that liberty is generally used by these liberals instead of freedom. Recently, Middleton Murry, who has become a Marxist, stated that, having lost his liberty, he gained his freedom. He now knows what the old hymn means, "Make me a captive, Lord, and then I shall be free." Emphasizing this aspect of Marxism necessitates our recalling, in line with Marx's debt to Hegel, that Hegel had said: "Freedom is the knowledge of necessity."

A third major challenge of Marxism is in its emphasis on the centrality of the process in interpreting reality.

Here again Marx follows closely on Hegel's emphasis. With Hegel, as one of his interpreters declares:

Nothing could be understood in its bare immediacy. Nothing was self-evident. Nothing was independent of anything else. A meaning could be grasped in relation to some meaning (or system of meanings) which it implied and which implied it. In effect, if not in intent, what Hegel did was to dissolve all things into their relations, construe these relations as logical categories, and present the inter-relationships of the logical categories as a process.

(In Marx the emphasis on change, process and development is even more pronounced than in Hegel.) Whereas with Hegel his system cramped the process, with Marx the system was the process. Nothing exists outside of the continuum of directed movement. The character of the historical present is shown to involve the past and suggest the future. Of this viewpoint Marx correctly says:

In its rational form it is a scandal and an abomination to the bourgeoisie and its doctrinaire spokesmen, because it included in its positive understanding of the existing state of things at the same time an understanding of its negation, of its necessary disappearance; because it regards every historically developed social form as in a fluid movement, interpreting from its transitional side; because it lets nothing impose on it and is in its essence critical and revolutionary.

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This quotation from Marx leads directly into the middle of the next challenge, which, in addition to being probably the most effective practical challenge of a movement of naturalistic activism, is at the same time the distinctive contribution of Karl Marx to the history of thought. I refer to his *dialectic method*, which he applied to the problems of social change in the interests of the theory and practice of social revolution. The dialectic method of Marx has been the "algebra of revolution." In a society of class divisions society attains self-consciousness through class consciousness. Consciousness implies activity. As a result of the activity of class consciousness, the social whole becomes transformed. I don't need to point out how foreign this whole philosophical implementation is to dominant Christianity.

Marx's dialectic has usually been considered a mystery to its critics. However, it is so important that I think we ought to try to understand it. First of all, you, who have studied Hegel's dialectic with its triadic phases:

Thesis

Antithesis

Synthesis

must not consider this triadic aspect to be particularly significant in Marxism. As Sidney Hook, in a manuscript not yet published, but to be published, says:

It is not so much the number of phases that a situation has which makes it dialectical, but a specific relation of opposition between these phases which generates a succession of other phases.

The necessary situation has at least two phases, distinct but not separate. The sufficient condition of a dialectical situation is given when these two phases present a relation of *opposition* and *interaction*, such that the result:

- (a) exhibits something qualitatively new;
- (b) preserves some of the structural elements of the interacting phases; and
- (c) eliminates others.

If there were sufficient space, it would be interesting to show how the rise of Hitler in Germany, the Scottsboro case, and the aggression of Japan in Manchuria can be understood in a quite new way in terms of this dialectical process.

In closing I should like to re-emphasize that I consider Marxism—it would be better to say the world situation which Marxism seeks to interpret and to change—to be incomparably the greatest



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challenge before us. Already, as I see it, the class struggle is beginning to near the decisive hour, measured in terms of historical epochs, and the process of dissolution in bourgeois society is accelerating at a terrific rate. One begins to see the effects of this process in those sections of the churches which are most sensitive to social, economic and cultural trends. An example of what I mean by this process of dissolution and its effect is found in a striking way in contemporary literature.

The discussion of proletarian literature, which is so widespread at the present time, is an outgrowth of the realization that bourgeois literature is no longer inspiring or challenging today. A new class is arising in society which has new interests and, therefore, new needs. The culture which sufficed for a previous class which had different interests will not suffice for the new class whose interests contradict it. But this need for a new set of values is peculiar not only to those who have identified themselves with the proletarian aspiration. It is a need which is felt throughout the length and breadth of our age. The collapse of the old values which the bourgeois class introduced into literature has succeeded in driving writers in the European as well as the American world into two camps: either that of revolution or reaction. The liberal position has lost its hold on some of the most distinguished writers and thinkers of our day. Harking back to the feudal concepts of the Roman Catholic Church, with the promise of spiritual rescue which their embrace assures, scores of writers have adopted Catholicism as a solution for their individual equations. To mention a few: Ernest Hemingway, Jean Cocteau, Willa Cather, Evelyn Waugh, Sigrid Undset, Compton Mackenzie, Shane Leslie, and T. S. Eliot. Those who are lined up with the revolutionists are: George Bernard Shaw, Maxim Gorky, Upton Sinclair, Ernst Glaesser, Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, Romain Rolland, Henri Barbusse, John Dos Passos, Theodore Dreiser, Waldo Frank, Malcolm Cowley, Edmund Wilson, and others.

I expect to see an increasing number of churchmen divide on somewhat the same lines.

## The Challenge of Christianity to Marxism

Henry P. Van Dusen

AT the outset it may be well to mark out the areas of agreement between Marxism and Christianity, or at least the areas in which Christianity raises no necessary objection to Marxist doctrine.

Let it be said at once that Christianity finds nothing in the *dialectic interpretation of history* incompatible with its own view of the matter. The conception of opposites clashing and mutually fructifying each other is one which has familiar place in Christian thought both in this and in a wider reference. One of our younger Christian thinkers, writing some years ago before the rise of Communism and without dependence upon Hegel and speaking of the marks of true education, urged the need of:

an adequate historical perspective; some understanding of the great cyclic movements ofebb and flow in man's thought and man's progress—the action and reaction which determine that periods of great idealism are succeeded by times of blunt realism; that romanticism or emotionalism is followed by conservatism, dogmatism, reaction; that intellectualism gives place to moral and spiritual sterility; that great prosperity is invariably succeeded by superficiality, then arrogance, then disillusionment, then cynicism, then withdrawal from the world, then moral decline, and finally retrogression; some ability, therefore, to locate the facts and movements of one's own day in their true place in the drama of history, distinguishing those features of contemporary life which are inevitable reactions from what has just preceded, those which mark genuinely fresh contributions to life and thought.

Again, Christianity finds no difficulty with the Marxist *emphasis upon revolution*. Its founder was executed as a dangerous revolutionary. Authentic Christianity has always generated strongly revolutionary influences in the life of society. We may quote from the same Christian writer:

There is an inherent lethargy, entropy, conservatism, in human affairs which brings it about that when men try to preserve the status quo, they actually get stagnation; when they seek evolutionary change, they get a continuance of the status quo; when they strike for revolution, they achieve progress.

Nor should Christians be too greatly alarmed by the very keystone of the Marxist system—the *theory of "dialectical materialism."*

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This is a phrase of obscure meaning and dire associations for many who employ it. It cannot be too often stressed that it has small part with traditional materialism—all that we mean by materialism as the arch-enemy of a theistic view of the world. Indeed, Marx developed his doctrine in bitter criticism of the mechanism and fatalism of traditional materialism. His great faith was in man's freedom from mechanistic determination, man's power through creative activity to turn the course of history. The point has been well made by Professor Sidney Hook that dialectical materialism is a "philosophy held under other names by many who disavow" the Communist political interests altogether. Professor Hook further reminds us that its fundamental metaphysical view has close affinities with Aristotelianism—surely not a very forbidding enemy of Christianity in the light of classical Christian theology.

### II

Where, then, can we locate the fundamental divergencies between Marxism and Christianity, and so be enabled to formulate the challenge of Christianity to Marxism? I shall suggest five.

1. The first concerns the *Determinative Conditions of Human History*.

Marxism offers its theory of the *economic* determination of history. The dialectic movement of action and reaction in mankind's life which is so obvious to the acute student is interpreted in economic terms. Here Engel's oft-quoted statement is classic:

The ultimate cause and great moving power of all important historic events is the economic development of society, changes in the modes of production and exchange.

To the suggestion of the economic determination of history Christianity offers an alternative interpretation—that of the *moral* determination of history. It is Christianity's profound conviction that the ultimate factors and forces which surround mankind's life in the large and determine its advance and retreat—the conditions of its true progress—are ethical in character. Indeed, that economic forces are determinative of human history only in the measure that they are representative of moral realities. Therefore a true appraisal of their significance can be had only through understanding the moral forces which condition and empower them. By the same token, wisdom for mankind's advances is to be sought primarily through deeper apprehension of the moral character of reality.

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This conviction of Christianity, like all profound certainties, is born of an initial intuition into the character of reality; but it receives its confirmation from fearless analysis of the brute facts of human history. If it be said that it is idealistic in content, it is an idealism made secure by the most determined and unremitting realism. The sensitive human conscience feels itself commanded by an absolute moral law, a law which is somehow written into the nature of things. That is the seed of the initial intuition. And it is not mistaken. For that law finds concrete embodiment in fact, in the structure of a moral order which surrounds human life, both personal and social, and forever reminds it of the essentially ethical frame-work within which it is set. In the long view, the wages of sin is death; one need only sin with sufficient abandon, forthrightness and persistency to be sure of that fact. It is Christianity's insight that this is as true for society as for the individual. Human freedom, whether for individual or for race, to follow the dictates of desire is real, but it moves within fixed and inexorable limits which represent the moral structure of the universe. A too great defiance of the laws of that structure brings its inevitable penalty.

The saga of mankind's pilgrimage is living witness to this fact. It has been well said, "The welfare of society is dependent upon a practical recognition of moral principles—the laws of morality are conditions of the progress and even of the existence of society."\* Where in all history shall we look for clearer confirmation of this truth than to our world's life in this hour? The Christian sees the present depression as fundamentally due to sin—willful or careless blindness to the moral structure of reality—the sin of gluttony for money and for power and for a specious prosperity, the sin of sharp and heartless business practice, of false objectives, of unlimited reliance upon basically unethical axioms, the sin of blindness which could not see economic truth because it did not love moral right—such sin as exacts its wage not merely from the sinners but from their fellowmen. It is the judgment of the moral order upon our life. It is history's stern reminder that we live in a world where material and selfish ideals cannot ultimately prevail; that ethical forces in some sense underlie and precede and determine economic and political problems, that man's social life in the large advances within the constraining framework of the moral design of God.\*\*

\* Robert Flint, "Theism," p. 227.

\*\* The foregoing paragraph is taken in part from "The Plain Man Seeks for God," Ch. II.



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We have cited the most familiar and contemporary evidence. It is only the most vivid, because most recent, illustration of the truth to which all human history bears abundant evidence. Christianity has watched the rise and fall of empire after empire, civilization after civilization. It has seen economy succeed economy, each rooted in some particular economic dogma which has refused recognition of the ethical considerations which alone could have given it power to endure. It has seen its own movement persist through the advent and decline of system after system. It knows that the vigor and significance of its endurance in any agony of transition was proportional to its disentanglement from the unethical economic and political dogmas then prevailing, its fidelity to its faith in the moral character of reality. It sees no reason to believe that in our day an economic program based in part on non-ethical premises and employing non-ethical means for its triumph will experience greater permanence or bring greater benefit to mankind. It is confirmed in its insight that the determinative conditions in human history are ethical and that they will finally prevail.

To this basic contrast two others are closely related.

### 2. *The Legitimate Methods of Social Change.*

For the realization of its social goals, Marxism leans heavily upon the inevitability of the class struggle, and does not hesitate before any employment of coercion which is likely to further its objectives. But it is implicit in Christianity's certainty of the ethical unity of reality that it places confidence in no methods for the accomplishment of social change, however worthy the goal, which are not themselves consonant with the goal desired. The end cannot justify the means. To employ injustice, violence, coercion, for the achievement of socially desirable ends, is to set loose in the world forces of evil which—the universe being a moral unity—are certain to take their toll from those who employ them and to qualify, and in some measure nullify, the good ends achieved. How far Christians can justify to themselves the use of milder forms of coercion under what appear to be the necessities of social conflict is a very puzzling question. But that they cannot lend acquiescence to the types and extent of coercion which are avowed by the practical program of Communism is indisputable.

### 3. *The Recreative Principle in Human History.*

Marxism conceives the development of social life by economic factors; Christianity by moral forces. By the same token, Marxism places its confidence for the reconstruction of society and the achieve-

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ment of the better life for men primarily in the reorganization of the economic order. Christianity primarily in the agency of creative persons. To be sure the contrast here is by no means absolute. It was Marx's great departure from traditional materialism that he affirmed that men can influence their own destiny; there is much talk in Marxist writings about "creative human activity." But how far Marxism is from making its practical philosophy consistent with this belief, how far it is still actually under the dominance of the old view, is clearly revealed in its literature.\* The emphasis falls almost wholly upon "forces," "systems," "isms." It is this which gives to Marxism its impression of incurable abstraction, its servitude to an artificial ideology. To sink one's mind in the Marxist writings is to feel oneself removed from real life, from the simple but dynamic facts and relationships which actually characterize human experience. This is part of its unhappy legacy from Hegel.

In this respect, Marxism falls into the error which vitiates many philosophies of history. Their temptation is to fasten attention upon general tendencies, the play of great impersonal forces, and to interpret history in these terms, deterministically. And so their conclusions appear fatalistic and pessimistic. The outcome is a gloomy one. We recoil from their despair; but we cannot put our fingers on their inadequacy. They falsify the story because they have lost from their view the creative principle in history—the vision and life and influence of the individual person. This is Christianity's distinctive contribution to a philosophy of history. We speak familiarly of the Christian ideal as a "society dominated by love." That is not altogether accurate, for it too speaks of an abstraction. Rather, the Christian ideal is a society permeated, and in some measure redeemed by the influence of loving persons. In that ideal is revealed the force upon which Christianity relies for the gradual emancipation and improvement of society.

\* So liberal an interpreter of Marxism as Sidney Hook, seeking to save it from this very charge, admits "that most of Marx's disciples have actually agreed with his critics—not perhaps in so many words—but as far as the objective intent of their interpretation goes." He then goes on to this amazing declaration, "A Charlemagne, a Mahomet, a George Washington or a Frederick II boasted the possession of no qualities so unique that other men could not have easily been found to lead the movements whose titular heads they were. Today the same can be said of Hitler or Gandhi. It is no exaggeration to maintain that if they had not been what they were, then, historically speaking, others would have been what they were." ("Toward the Understanding of Karl Marx," pp. 164-5.)



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### 4. *The Validity of Apocalypticism and the Character of Human Nature.*

Marxism prophesies the advent of "the classless society." It appears to hold undiscourageable confidence in men's response to the promise of a better order, and in the perfectibility of human nature.

Now to a mature Christianity, this is the veriest romanticism. Mr. Henson has suggested that Marxism is realistic, Christianity idealistic. But where in the whole gamut of contemporary thought can we detect such romantic idealism? With all its emphasis upon a philosophy of history, has Marxism learned nothing from the story of the human pilgrimage?

It may seem strange indeed that Christianity, itself born in a vivid apocalyptic hope, should bring strictures against a high eschatology. But the wisest Christianity has learned from its own past. It knows that the perfect society is not to be seen in our world, either by divine intervention or human reconstruction. It knows that the classes which divide society are the inevitable fruit of tendencies deep within human nature. The abolition of the existing classes, however desirable, will have its final issue in a new stratification of society in which each group again seeks to impose its will on all others. The ideal of a classless society is as chimerical as the vision of a perfect order on earth. Further, Christianity has learned that the forces which most require treatment for society's advance are lodged deep within each life, and will not be exorcised by any reordered system; they reappear and must be dealt with afresh in each generation and in every possible economy. In brief, Christianity knows something of *sin*.

### 5. *The Character of Ultimate Reality.*

We have come to feel before this that the deeper divergence between Marxism and Christianity is one of basic outlook, of ultimate certainty, of conviction of the structure of Reality. Mr. Henson has said that "Marxism is realistic; Christianity, idealistic." But, what is "the real"? That is the central issue.

Mr. Henson cited, as a typical Christian vindication of its beliefs, the argument that "what ought to be true, must be true." In contrast, Marxism begins with "what is." There is a type of Christian apologetic which has proceeded from "what ought to be" to "what is." It has never been an authentic statement; it has never claimed support from large numbers of Christians, nor from any for long periods. Christianity is not an argument from "what ought to be" to "what is." It is an argument from "what is" to "what is."

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Or, perhaps more significantly, from "what is" to "what may be." It reasons from what *is* indisputably real within a part of the totality of mankind's experience to what, on that account, might be completely *real* in the experience of all mankind. The Christian certainty does not concern something which is "ideal" in contradistinction to the "real."

Between the conception of the world as a nexus of impersonal and mechanistic economic forces which determine the conditions and the outcome of mankind's life, and the conception hinted above, there is, it will be agreed, a great gulf fixed.

## III

I was deeply impressed with the remark with which Mr. Henson concluded his paper: the suggestion that thinkers of today are rapidly being drawn into one of two opposed camps—that of revolution or that of reaction. But it would be a mistake to identify either of these two parties with Christianity. As a matter of fact, in every period of the Christian era, both tendencies have been strongly represented both within and without the Christian movement. Surely it would be a strange perspective which would define as reactionary a movement which was first thrust forth into the world in a vivid apocalyptic expectation, whose founder was executed as a dangerous revolutionary, which repeatedly has been spoken of as turning the world upside down, which in every period of revival has given birth to tremendous energies for radical social reconstruction.

No; the line of cleavage between Christianity and Marxism is not to be drawn in terms of the revolutionary-reactionary antithesis. What leads Christianity, whether conservative or radical, to issue challenge to Marxism and, indeed, to stand in frank and vigorous antagonisms to the practical program of Marxism, is something deeper by far. Speaking of Wordsworth as representative of the rebellion of the early nineteenth-century poets against the scientific materialism of their day, Whitehead says:

Wordsworth was not bothered by any intellectual antagonism. What moved him was moral repulsion. He felt that something had been left out, and that what had been left out comprised everything that was most important. . . .

Once more, what moves Christianity is not primarily an intellectual antagonism. What stirs Christianity is a moral repulsion. It "knows in its bones" that in Marxism as it is actually functioning

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in much of its practice, *something* has been left out. And that what has been left out comprises everything that is most important. Again, it is a protest in behalf of value. It is possible that in the authenticity and power of that protest, and in its successful outcome, as much is at stake for mankind as in the earlier release from scientific materialism.

## Is Marxism Compatible with Christianity?

Sidney Hook

I HAVE yielded to the earnest invitation of the editor of *The Christian Register* to comment upon the discussion between Mr. Henson and Mr. Van Dusen, with some reluctance. The fundamental presuppositions which both disputants share are so foreign to the Marxian tradition and to my own way of thinking that they seem to me to be more significant than their differences. In addition, the subject is complicated by the absence of strict definitions, so that I am at a loss to say whether terms like God, Christianity, ethics, and love are being used in a Pickwickian and emotive sense, or with the literal meanings which traditional religions have given them.

### Violently Redefining Terms

This point is of more than verbal importance, because it seems to me that anyone who asserts that Marxism is compatible with Christianity—or any religion—can do so only by violently redefining these terms for the purposes of the occasion. Philosophically, Marxism is evolutionary (dialectical) naturalism or scientific materialism; Christianity necessarily involves some form of idealism—whether personalistic, mentalistic or speculative. Logically, these views are contraries; both may be false but both cannot be true. It is with the question of their relative truth that I wish to concern myself here, and not with exegetical inquiries. I shall take Mr. Van Dusen's paper as the basis for the discussion. Although he very properly insists upon the radical divergence between Marxism and Christianity, he contends that on some points there is a pretty thoroughgoing agreement between them—notably in the emphasis on dialectic thinking and revolutionary activity. I wish to go further than he does, and to maintain that wherever Christianity agrees with Marxism it is at the cost of a crying inconsistency with its own principles and a relapse into eclecticism.

1. The first of the five differences which Mr. Van Dusen enumerates between Marxism and Christianity concerns the *determinative conditions of human history*. Against the Marxian "economic interpretation" of history, Mr. Van Dusen opposes as the alter-



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native of Christianity "the moral interpretation" of history. This offers us an opportunity to test, in the social realm, the relative worth of the idealistic and naturalistic approach.

According to Mr. Van Dusen the ultimate forces which determine the historical pattern are ethical. Any other factors which contribute a determining influence do so only in so far as they represent "moral realities." What is true for the basic pattern must be true of the most outstanding events within it, and so, consistently enough, Mr. Van Dusen says of the greatest crisis in modern times what he would probably say of the fall of the Roman Empire, or of the American Civil War, or of the Russian Revolution: "The Christian sees the present depression as fundamentally due to sin—willful or careless blindness to the moral structure of reality. . . ."

To a Marxist this view is very difficult to understand and still more difficult to accept. It strikes him as careless blindness to attribute unemployment, falling prices, bankruptcies, foreclosures and their attendant disasters to human sinfulness, which, if I understand Mr. Van Dusen, has been pretty constant in all periods of human history and, indeed, is almost—so he seems to suggest—an integral part of human nature. What is the evidence, the Marxist inquires, that human beings were more sinful in 1929 than in 1923? And why, for example, did the depression become more intense as church memberships increased, to mention only one amusing correlation? And what is a sin? Mr. Van Dusen speaks of the sin of gluttony for money and for power and for a specious prosperity. By "gluttony for money" does Mr. Van Dusen mean perhaps "hoarding" or "saving instead of spending"? But this was once a virtue called "thrift"—and it was called a virtue precisely at those times when capital accumulation was necessary for the needs of an expanding economy. Whether it be regarded as a virtue or a vice, why should "gluttony for money or power" have had such disparate economic effects at different times? Further, if human immorality is the cause of the depression, then human morality ought to get us out. What would Mr. Van Dusen recommend? Granted the will to be saved, can the point in the social structure at which it would be necessary to implement that will, be deduced from the mere existence of the will? Whether he begins with the mechanisms of credit, finance, politics or education, is he not admitting that the causal agencies must be sought elsewhere than in human morality?

### Major Calamities do not "Happen"

We need not labor the point. For a Marxist the major calam-

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ities which overtake human beings as members of the social order, especially in times of depression, are events which "happen" to them in the sense that no ethical responsibility is involved. It borders on gratuitous libel to attribute their misfortune to their sinfulness. Although the Marxist is not strong on Christian charity, he does not even hold the great industrialists and financiers responsible for what has happened. It is clear that they themselves did not, and do not, know what it is all about. Here is not the place to argue the Marxian hypothesis that the objective contradictions between the ever-expanding forces of production and the relatively ever-narrowing range of consumption, both of which flow from the capitalist relations of production, is the chief cause of the crisis. For even a non-Marxist would object to Mr. Van Dusen's theory of history on the ground that it made *any* explanation of the social process impossible.

A Marxist cannot grant that ethical factors are "ultimately" determining. They may have proximate influence upon events. But an examination of these ethical factors will always show that they have a specific content in a determinate context. Man's desire for the better may be invariant, but that does not tell us *what* he regards as better in any historical situation. That is why the scientific approach which the Marxist takes to ethics is relevant. He attempts to explain why ethical patterns of response change, why conflicting ethical views are found when and where they are, why one group subscribes to them rather than another, etc. He even attempts to explain something which, curiously enough, Mr. Van Dusen cannot explain in terms of his own Christian hypothesis and methods, viz., the development of Christian doctrine itself, the changes in its organization, its varying attitudes towards interest, divorce, and the transcendent nature of the divinity.

### The Moral Structure of Reality

From the philosophical point of view what puzzles a Marxist most of all is the phrase the "moral structure of reality." Mr. Van Dusen repeats this several times. What does it mean? From a naturalist's point of view, value is the object of human interest, and morality, the organization of human interests. The locus of value and morality is individual but their content is social. Does Mr. Van Dusen mean that the principles of value and morality are *constitutive* of the universe, that, as all objective idealists believe, the cosmic order is a moral order? If so, how can be justify the



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normative character of morality, how can he escape the conclusion that whatever is, is right? He affirms that, in virtue of the "constraining framework of the moral design of God," no material or selfish ideals can ultimately prevail. If this statement is not a tautology, but is asserted as a meaningful and true proposition, what is the evidence for it? History? But the record shows that selfish and material-minded groups have prevailed at least as often as other groups. And if they have ultimately gone down to defeat, the same is true for "unselfish" groups, among whom we may number some noble Christian sects as well. Mr. Van Dusen's philosophy of history is really a theology. But even as theology, it has many difficulties which can be traced to two inconsistent strands within it—an immanent teleology with Roycean overtones of a spiritual community of love, which at least has the merit of grappling with the problem of evil, and the "transcendent God" of dialectical theology whom Karl Barth found when he made a virtue of his unwillingness to grapple analytically with the problem of evil. For Marxists, as for all naturalists, there is no problem of evil; there are only problems and evils. The soluble problems and remedial evils are primarily social.

2. This brings me to point 4 in Mr. Van Dusen's enumeration. He accuses Marxism of being romantic in its belief in a social apocalypse, and points out that since "Christianity knows something of sin," it is more realistic in its attitude toward human nature and human failure. The plain implication is that Marxists hold to the view that, with the change from a capitalist to a collectivist order, mankind will be free from all moral and intellectual deficiencies and that the reign of heaven on earth will be inaugurated.

### Communism—The End of All Evils?

It has become quite fashionable for critics of Marxism to seize upon the silly pretensions of silly "orthodox" communists that Communism means the end of all evils, oppression, jealousy, maladministration, etc. The critics are perfectly justified in charging that this view is Utopian and evidence of a puerile optimism. As if the whole of man's life is social!—and as if the liberation of man from the blind social forces of an unplanned economy does anything more than give him greater ethical responsibility for his actions! The critics do well to suspect any faith in the existence of a perfect social harmony—now or in the future. Would they were as critical of the still larger faith in a *cosmic* harmony! But the point I wish to stress

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is that there is no warrant for believing that Marx and Engels ever held the view attributed to them. On the contrary, there is considerable evidence that in their criticisms of the Utopian socialists, St. Simon and Fourier, and of the sentimental socialists of the Feuerbachian variety, Marx and Engels directed their critical shafts precisely against the unhistorical social illusions of these schools.

There is, however, a world of difference between Marxists who admit that collective control of the mechanical conditions of social life does not automatically carry with it the assurance that such control will be exercised in the most intelligent and ethical direction, and Christians like Mr. Van Dusen who believe that man is inherently sinful, and that, no matter what institutional equivalents for his sinfulness are found, the spiritual quality of his motives and actions will be the same. Like some other followers of dialectical theology, Mr. Van Dusen holds to the paradoxical view that man is naturally so evil that only when he is living in the best possible society, can he understand how really bad he is. To a Marxist the only empirical equivalent of "the soul" is "consciousness," and he can understand what is meant by "sin" only on the supposition that when the Christian speaks of "sin," he means "selfishness." But the ethical quality of selfishness or unselfishness is not intrinsic but flows from the consequences of selfish or unselfish actions in specific situations. A man who unselfishly beggars himself and his family in behalf of an unworthy person or cause is not morally superior to a person who selfishly demands what is his due, knowing full well that if he does not stand on his rights, a precedent for injuring others will be established. For a Marxist, neither selfishness nor unselfishness is virtue or vice. If he is a realist, he understands that so long as man lives in an imperfect world, there will always be suffering, injustice and accident. But he points out that these need not be economic in form; nor need they be regarded as evidence of original sin; nor need they be necessarily lamented as absolute evils. For the nature of man is such that he can live only in a world which is imperfect in many respects. In fact some of his best qualities can be realized only in so far as they are accompanied by negative qualities. In a world in which there would be no jealousy, there would be no romantic love; in a world in which there would be no envy, there would be no ambition, zestful achievement or watchful justice; where personal discrimination would be lacking, the marked preferment of deep friendship would be impossible. The community of saints is neither a possible nor a desirable ideal.

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3. Mr. Van Dusen's second point concerns the legitimacy of coercion as a method of social change. The use of such coercion, he holds, violates "the ethical unity of reality," whatever that may mean. Here again we note the characteristic shift between the attitude of Job-like acquiescence towards the world and the attitude of normative ethical inquiry and activity. If it be true that "the universe is a moral unity" then nothing within it can be declared essentially evil—including the use of coercion. If only a selected aspect of the universe be regarded as good, what are the ethical criteria of the selection? If non-resistance or non-assertion be one of the intrinsic and unqualifiable criteria of selection, then Mr. Van Dusen must condemn as unethical *every* form of social life, for it is a commonplace of political scientists and realistic historians that no social organization, about which we have knowledge, has ever existed without some organ of sovereignty; and every expression of sovereignty involves coercion—explicit or implicit. Surely Mr. Van Dusen cannot mean that the conventional impositions of coercion are moral, and that coercion is immoral only when it is used by an oppressed class. A Marxist may grant that coercion is intrinsically bad just as the infliction of any kind of pain, as such, upon human beings is bad. But that judgment does not imply that it is wrong to use coercion unless it can be shown that non-coercive measures can be taken which promise to be just as effective as the more direct ones. In any situation the Marxist judges coercion in the light of the total context of its use. The sentimental refusal to employ force to stop a man about to harm or kill others, or the refusal to take active measures of opposition against a war of nations, is itself a sign of immorality and lends objective aid to the killers and war-makers.

### Coercion Only as an Instrument of Last Resort

The Marxist is as human and humane as any realistic Christian, but he does not subscribe to a creed or dogma of non-resistance which makes every one of his actions appear to be inconsistent. The Marxist justifies coercion only as an instrument of last resort, only as it has the sanction of a majority of the producing classes, and only as a measure of *defense* against the brutal onslaughts of minority groups, in power or out, who try to set the will of the great masses of the population at naught. The historical record shows that oppressed groups always suffer more violence than they inflict, that they have literally been goaded into active resistance and generally give

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battle under disadvantageous conditions. The Christian who preaches non-resistance to an oppressed group is literally attempting to undermine its will to opposition. (I have developed this theory at greater length in Chapter XVIII of my book, "Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx.")

Sometimes "orthodox" Communists speak as if they had made a fetish of force. There is nothing in Marx or Lenin to justify this. In fact, Lenin called it part of a disease known as "infantile leftism." It is becoming increasingly important to distinguish on the one hand between critical Marxism based on Marx's teachings and on the *laws of logic*, and on the other hand between "orthodox" social-democracy and "orthodox" Communism which in different ways emasculate Marx's real views. If they are interested in a correct analysis of the Marxist position and not merely in an easy refutation, opponents of Marxism should come to grips with the views developed in Marx's own writings and not in those of his fanatical hero-worshippers, who more often than not have not read him.\*

### The Individual and History

4. Mr. Van Dusen's third point concerns itself with the importance of individuals as the "creative principle in history." Marxists are reproached with not properly understanding what Mr. Van Dusen calls "Christianity's distinctive contribution to a philosophy of history." Now I wish to point out that not all Christians would agree with Mr. Van Dusen that the individual is the creative principle in history. Certainly in different ways, Hegel and Royce would stress the importance of the community, of Objective Mind—language, law, custom, art—of the operation of the great institutions of objective mind—the family, church, and state—which explain the contents of the individual mind and not vice versa. In fact, it seems an impossible task to explain the trends of world-history, the rise and fall of empires, the change in ideal patterns, including the varying estimates of the importance of the individual

\* In justice to my readers I wish to make clear that I do not regard either the Socialist Party or the Communist Party as Marxist parties. The *American Workers Party*, communist in philosophy, realistic in its tactics and strategy and capable of linking up its ideals with the revolutionary traditions of our own historical experience seems to me to be the organization with the greatest revolutionary potentialities at the present time.



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in society, in terms of "the vision and life and influence of the individual person."

Marxists believe that man makes his own history, but they do not believe that every particular person does. Collective man is the author of his own historic fate, but his activity at any time is limited and prescribed by certain determinate conditions—his physical environment, his biological potentialities and the economic and cultural consequences of his past activities. These socio-physical forces by themselves produce nothing. Men are the efficient factors of every social act. But sometimes these conditioning factors are so strong that, no matter which men are in a position to wield influence, it is safe to say that the direction and consequences of their activity would be the same. At other times—much more infrequently—a man specially endowed by nature, or entering the political scene at a moment when the constellation of social forces is rapidly shifting (e.g., Lenin's return to Russia), will exercise an influence not uniquely deducible from the normal operation of these social forces without him. This is an empirical matter to be settled by an analysis of particular cases. The impression of incurable abstraction which Marxist historiography makes upon Mr. Van Dusen is in part due to the very nature of a historical account which, since it involves selective reorganization of the past, can never be as rich as the actual historic experience. To expect to catch the whole of the past in our present knowledge of it is to expect knowledge to create the subject matter which it seeks to understand—a metaphysical impossibility on all views except idealism. In part, Mr. Van Dusen's impression is derived from the writings of dogmatic and incompetent Marxists who think the possession of a formula makes detailed historic research unnecessary. The best way to correct the impression is to read the historical writings of Marx and Engels, Lenin and Trotsky and Mehring, and, with certain cautions and corrections, the major works of our own Charles Beard.

5. The fifth and most important difference between Marxism and Christianity, according to Mr. Van Dusen, concerns the question of the nature of "ultimate reality." It is difficult to discuss the "nature of ultimate reality," because these words are infected with profound metaphysical ambiguity. What, e.g., does that little word "Real" mean? Offhand one can distinguish at least three different meanings. (1) *Real* may mean what exists in space and time; (2) *Real* may be a value term and express a preference, moral or esthetic; (3) *Real* may mean "necessary condition" or "independent

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variable," which is what the scientist intends when he distinguishes between the "real" conditions of color and its actual experience.

For a Marxist, the "realities" of the world are discovered by experiment, analysis and reflection upon all the relevant data of experience. The realities of the physical world, although always present, may not be the realities of the psychological, social or esthetic world. There is only one world, but it presents many aspects or realms. The key categories to these realms must be found in the structure and behavior of the objects studied. The physical realm is "fundamental" in the order of time but not in the order of significance. If I can guess at Mr. Van Dusen's meaning, I think that he differs with the Marxists primarily on the question of the metaphysical status of ethical ideals. For a Marxist, ethical ideals have *social* reality. They emerge in a social context and outside the historical behavior of men, the structure of their organisms and the character of their cultures, it is meaningless to say that the world as a cosmic whole is ethical. Ethical ideals arise out of determinate *social* conditions and have as their function the perpetuation or transformation of the social order in which they have developed. In the eyes of a Marxist, any other view of the status of ethical ideals leads to unintelligible mysticism or else to the position that "whatever is, is right."

Mr. Henson is right, I believe, over against Mr. Van Dusen in his claim that the future will see churchmen divided on the social issue and compelled to choose between the two camps of reaction or revolution. A Marxist would add, however, that so long as they remain within the church they are aiding the camp of reaction. The social principles of Christianity in so far as they are specifically Christian and construed in terms of the institutional behavior of churches can never be adequate to profound social change. Marx's views on religion may appear in the light of modern comparative religion as much too crude and simple. His dictum that religion is the opium of the people fails to explain, for example, the nature of primitive religion, its multiple psychological motivation, and why in class societies all ruling classes have religions of their own and believe in them as fervently as oppressed classes do. But in essence Marx was right. Whoever approaches the problem of Christianity and social justice from a *historical* point of view cannot deny that the following passage from Marx is substantially accurate:

The social principles of Christianity have had eighteen centuries in which to develop, and have no need to undergo further devel-



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opment at the hands of Prussian consistorial councillors. The social principles of Christianity justified the slavery of classical days; they glorified medieval serfdom; and they are able when needs be to defend the oppression of the proletariat, though with a somewhat crestfallen air. The social principles of Christianity proclaim the need for the existence of a ruling class and a subjugated class, being content to express the pious hope that the former will deal philanthropically with the latter. The social principles of Christianity assume that there will be compensation in heaven for all the infamies committed on earth, and thereby justify the persistence of these infamies here below. The social principles of Christianity explain that the atrocities perpetrated by the oppressors on the oppressed are either just punishments for original and other sins, or else trials which the Lord in his wisdom ordains for the redeemed. The social principles of Christianity preach cowardice, self-contempt, abasement submission, humility; . . . and the proletariat, which will not allow itself to be treated as canaille, needs courage, self-confidence, pride, a sense of personal dignity and independence, even more than it needs daily bread. The social principles of Christianity are lick-spittle, whereas the proletariat is revolutionary. So much for the social principles of Christianity!

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